

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

DEPARTMENT OF
MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND GENETICS



725 N. WOLFE STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21205

August 28, 1990

The Honorable Tom Harkin
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

I am writing to express my support for the NIH-sponsored National Center for Human Genome Research. As a member of the National Research Council Committee that recommended special funding to map and sequence the human genome and the genomes of experimentally important related organisms, I am convinced that this effort will pay off in terms of accelerating the basic understanding of human biology and human disease. In the long run, this understanding will almost certainly lead to new ways to prevent or treat a broad range of illnesses.

The human genome project is often called "big science" and lumped with SSC and NASA's mission to Mars. However, there are important differences between the genome project and the others. First, the projected annual expenditures of the genome project are considerably less (about 2 percent of the total NIH budget); second, there is a specific, attainable goal, which once achieved will be a valuable resource forever; third, even partial completion of the genome project (for example, a map and part of the sequence) will itself be very valuable; and fourth, there will be clear human benefit, some of it right away (for example, the isolation disease-related genes useful in diagnosis, or the identification of new hormones).

In my opinion much (not all) of the recent opposition to the human genome project has resulted from the current crisis in funding of individual investigators. Individual research projects are still the basis of most discoveries and clearly need to be funded adequately. However, I hope the importance of support for individual research projects does not obscure the great value of the human genome project. I urge you and the other members of the Subcommittee on Appropriations to restore the 1991 budget of the National Center for Human Genome Research to the level recommended by the President.

Sincerely,

Daniel Nathans
Nobel Laureate in Medicine